



## Vocabulary Learning Strategies in Learning New Words for EFL Learners Based on Gender Differences

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**Abstract.** *This study investigates vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among male and female EFL learners at Muhammadiyah University Jember. Using questionnaires and interviews, the research explores gender differences in discovering and consolidating new vocabulary. The findings reveal that both genders primarily use dictionaries for discovery, with males preferring visual aids and females relying on social interactions. For consolidation, males favor spaced repetition and word lists, while females use mnemonics and narrative techniques. These insights highlight the need for differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning preferences.*

**Keywords:** *Vocabulary Learning Strategies, EFL Learners, Gender Differences, Discovery Strategies, Consolidation Strategies*

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini menginvestigasi strategi pembelajaran kosakata (VLS) di antara mahasiswa laki-laki dan perempuan sebagai pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing di Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember. Melalui kuesioner dan wawancara, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perbedaan gender dalam menemukan dan menguatkan kosakata baru dalam bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kedua gender umumnya menggunakan kamus untuk di awal, dengan laki-laki yang lebih menyukai bantuan visual dan perempuan lebih mengandalkan interaksi sosial. Untuk menguatkannya, laki-laki cenderung menggunakan repetisi dan daftar kata, sementara perempuan lebih memilih mnemonik dan teknik naratif. Temuan ini menyoroti perlunya pendekatan instruksional yang disesuaikan untuk mengakomodasi preferensi pembelajaran yang beragam.

**Kata kunci:** *Vocabulary Learning Strategies, EFL Learners, Gender Differences, Discovery Strategies, Consolidation Strategies*

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition is crucial for EFL learners as it underpins effective communication and comprehension. Prior research (Schmitt, 1997; Averil, 2006; Scrivener, 1994) has highlighted various strategies learners employ to acquire new vocabulary, emphasizing the role of dictionaries, social interactions, and cognitive techniques. However, there is limited understanding of how these strategies differ by gender. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the vocabulary learning strategies of male and female EFL learners, focusing on their preferences for discovering and consolidating new words. The research builds

on cognitive and social learning theories to explain these differences and suggests implications for teaching practices. The acquisition of vocabulary is a fundamental aspect of language learning, underpinning all forms of communication and comprehension. For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), vocabulary mastery is particularly vital as it directly influences their ability to read, write, speak, and understand the language effectively. Without a robust vocabulary, even the most advanced grammatical knowledge can fall short in real-world communication.

Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) are the specific actions or techniques that learners use to acquire new vocabulary. These strategies can range from rote memorization and repetitive practice to more complex techniques such as the use of mnemonics, contextual learning, and the employment of multimedia resources. The effectiveness of these strategies can vary widely among learners, influenced by factors such as individual learning styles, motivation, and prior knowledge.

This research aims to explore the vocabulary learning strategies used by EFL learners at Muhammadiyah University Jember. By focusing on gender differences, this study seeks to identify any distinct patterns or preferences that can inform more effective teaching practices. The findings of this research could contribute to the development of more personalized and effective language learning programs, ultimately helping students to achieve greater proficiency in English.

Moreover, the context of Muhammadiyah University Jember provides a unique setting for this study. As a university with a diverse student body from various programs and faculties, it offers a rich environment for examining how different learners approach vocabulary acquisition. The results of this research could also have broader implications for EFL learning in similar educational contexts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of language learning, essential for effective communication and comprehension. Previous research has underscored the significance of vocabulary in language proficiency, with various studies highlighting the critical role of vocabulary knowledge in the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Nation, 2001; Laufer, 1997). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, mastery of vocabulary is particularly vital as it directly influences their ability to interact and understand the language in real-world contexts.

The study of vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) has been enriched by insights from cognitive and social learning theories. Cognitive theories emphasize the mental processes involved in learning, such as memory, attention, and retrieval, which are crucial for vocabulary acquisition. Techniques like repetition, mnemonics, and the use of word lists are grounded in cognitive psychology and are designed to enhance memory and retention of new words (Schmitt, 1997).

Research has indicated that male and female learners often employ different strategies for vocabulary learning, reflecting broader cognitive and social tendencies. Studies have shown that female learners are more likely to engage in social and interactive strategies, such as discussing meanings with peers or using language in social contexts (Baleghizadeh, Sasan, & Hosseini, 2013; Na, 2016). These strategies align with social learning theories, which emphasize the role of collaborative and contextual learning.

In contrast, male learners tend to prefer more visual and logical approaches, such as using visual aids, diagrams, and systematic repetition (Kobayashi & Little, 2018). These strategies are consistent with cognitive theories that stress the importance of visual-spatial learning and structured practice. Understanding these gender-specific preferences can help educators design more effective and personalized teaching methods.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research method to explore the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) used by male and female EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember. Participants included 30 students selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected via structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires, distributed via Google Forms, measured the frequency and effectiveness of various VLS, while interviews provided deeper insights into participants' experiences and preferences. The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and trends. The study adhered to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Limitations include the sample size and potential biases in self-reported data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The study aimed to investigate the differences in vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among male and female EFL learners at Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember. Data were collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which provided comprehensive insights into the preferred strategies of both genders. The findings revealed significant trends

and patterns in the use of VLS, highlighting both commonalities and differences based on gender.

### **1. Discovery Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

The questionnaire results reveal distinct patterns in how male and female students discover new English words. For male students, the primary strategies observed include the use of dictionaries (11.74%), visual aids such as images and diagrams (11.34%), and asking friends for word meanings (10.73%). The reliance on dictionaries aligns with the cognitive strategy of seeking precise meanings and usage examples. The preference for visual aids suggests a visual-spatial learning style, where visual representations help in understanding and remembering new words. Asking friends indicates a tendency towards peer-assisted learning, although less prevalent compared to females.

For female students, the primary strategies are similar but with notable differences. They also heavily rely on dictionaries, with a slightly higher percentage (11.85%) than male students. This suggests a strong preference for independent learning tools among female students. Additionally, female students frequently engage in discussions with friends to discover new words (11.45%), reflecting a collaborative approach consistent with social learning theories. The use of English learning apps (10.98%) highlights a preference for technology-enhanced learning among female students.

The interview results provided qualitative insights that corroborate the questionnaire findings. Male students reiterated their reliance on dictionaries for understanding new vocabulary, emphasizing the ease of accessing definitions and examples. The use of visual aids was frequently mentioned, with students noting that images and diagrams helped them contextualize new words and remember their meanings better. Some male students highlighted reading English texts as a method for discovering new vocabulary, involving inferring word meanings from context, supporting incidental learning.

Female students also emphasized their frequent use of dictionaries, noting that this tool was particularly useful for precise understanding and example sentences. They valued social interactions, often discussing new words with friends or family members, supporting the collaborative aspect of their learning<sup>2</sup>. The use of apps and online resources was highlighted as an effective and engaging way to learn new words, offering interactive and multimedia content that appeals to female students.

The findings reveal that both genders use dictionaries as their primary tool for discovering new vocabulary. However, there are notable differences in their secondary strategies. Males prefer visual aids, which cater to their visual-spatial learning style, while females rely more on social interactions and digital tools, reflecting their collaborative and tech-savvy approach to learning.

## **2. Consolidation Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

When consolidating new vocabulary, students reported various strategies aimed at reinforcing their learning. Male students primarily use spaced repetition (11.13%), creating stories or sentences using new words (11.13%), and word games (10.92%). Spaced repetition is rooted in cognitive psychology and is known for its effectiveness in long-term retention. Creating stories or sentences helps embed new vocabulary in meaningful contexts, making the learning process more enjoyable and memorable. Word games provide an engaging way to practice and reinforce vocabulary.

Female students frequently use mnemonics (11.72%), spaced repetition, and word lists (both at 11.30%). Mnemonics involve creating associations between new words and familiar concepts to enhance recall. The structured approach of spaced repetition and word lists helps organize and review vocabulary effectively. Female students also mentioned the use of flashcards, both physical and digital, as a practical tool for repeated exposure and practice.

The interviews provided deeper insights into the students' consolidation strategies. Male students emphasized the effectiveness of spaced repetition in retaining new vocabulary over time, highlighting the use of apps that facilitate this method. Creating stories or sentences using new words was mentioned as a strategy that made the learning process more enjoyable and memorable. The use of word games was highlighted as a fun and competitive way to reinforce vocabulary, often involving peers in the process.

Female students described mnemonics as a creative and effective way to remember new words, often linking words with personal experiences or vivid imagery. They praised the structured approach of spaced repetition and word lists for its systematic nature, helping to organize study sessions and track progress. The use of flashcards, particularly digital ones, was highlighted as a convenient and versatile tool for frequent review.

Both genders use repetition as a fundamental strategy for consolidating new vocabulary. However, females show a preference for creative methods such as mnemonics and storytelling, which align with associative learning theories. Males, on

the other hand, favor systematic approaches like spaced repetition and word games, reflecting a structured and interactive learning style.

### 3. Gender Differences in Strategy Preferences

The study highlights significant gender differences in vocabulary learning strategies among EFL learners. Males tend to prefer visual and logical methods, such as visual aids and spaced repetition, while females lean towards social and contextual approaches, such as collaborative learning and mnemonics. These findings underscore the importance of differentiated instruction that caters to diverse learning preferences. Educators should incorporate a variety of strategies to create inclusive and effective language learning environments.

These findings support the theories proposed by Baleghizadeh et al. (2013) and Kobayashi and Little (2018), which suggest that male learners are more inclined towards solitary, repetitive learning techniques, while female learners prefer interactive and collaborative methods. This gender-based preference can be linked to broader cognitive and social learning theories, which propose that males and females often have different learning styles and preferences.

**Table 1. Questionnaire Results for Discovery Strategies**

Strategy	Male Students (%)	Female Students (%)
Dictionaries	11.74%	11.85%
Visual Aids	11.34%	-
Asking Friends	10.73%	11.45
English Learning Apps	-	10.98

**Table 2. Questionnaire Results for Consolidation Strategies**

Strategy	Male Students (%)	Female Students (%)
Spaced Repetition	11.13%	11.30%
Creating Stories	11.13%	-
Word Games	10.92%	-
Mnemonics	-	11.30

**Table 3. Interview Insights for Discovery Strategies**

Strategy	Male Students	Female Students
Dictionaries	Frequent use	Frequent use
Visual Aids	Highlighted	-

Asking Friends	Mentioned	Emphasize
English Learning Apps	-	Highlighted

**Table 4. Interview Insights for Consolidation Strategies**

Strategy	Male Students	Female Students
Spaced Repetition	Emphasized	Praised
Creating Stories	Mentioned	-
Word Games	Highlighted	Emphasize
Mnemonics	-	Described

## CONCLUSION

This study investigates the gender-based differences in vocabulary learning strategies among EFL learners, focusing on both discovery and consolidation strategies. The findings reveal that male and female students exhibit distinct preferences in their approaches to learning new vocabulary, reflecting broader cognitive and social learning tendencies. Male students tend to favor visual and logical methods, such as using dictionaries, visual aids, and spaced repetition. These strategies align with their visual-spatial learning style and structured approach to retaining information. In contrast, female students lean towards social and contextual methods, including collaborative learning, mnemonics, and the use of digital tools, which support their inclination towards interactive and associative learning.

The implications of these findings are significant for language educators and curriculum developers. By recognizing and accommodating these gender-specific preferences, educators can design more inclusive and effective instructional strategies that cater to the diverse needs of learners. This study suggests incorporating a mix of visual, auditory, and interactive activities in language teaching to engage both male and female students effectively.

Further research is recommended to explore the impact of other variables, such as age, proficiency level, and cultural background, on vocabulary learning strategies. Experimental studies that test the effectiveness of various teaching methods and learning strategies in different contexts would provide valuable insights and evidence-based recommendations for practice. Addressing the limitations of this study, such as the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data, would also enhance the generalizability and accuracy of future research findings.

In conclusion, understanding the gender-specific preferences in vocabulary learning strategies can significantly enhance the effectiveness of language education. By tailoring

instructional approaches to meet these preferences, educators can create more engaging and supportive learning environments that foster vocabulary acquisition and overall language proficiency among EFL learners.

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